

Message Text

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E.O. 11652: GDS

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SUBJECT: VOA COVERAGE OF PRC INTERNAL AFFAIRS

REF: A. STATE 173966; B. HONG KONG 8774

SUMMARY. ON QUESTION OF SUPPLYING ESSENTIAL POLICY REVIEW GUIDANCE FOR VOA HONG KONG CORRESPONDENT, CONGEN GELIEVES MATTER BEST HANDLED THROUGH EXISTING MECHANISMS. END SUMMARY.

1. AS INDICATED IN REF B, CONGEN SHARES USLO AND DEPARTMENT'S CONCERN OVER POSSIBLE ADVERSE EFFECTS OF U.S. SOURCED COMMENTARY ON PRC DOMESTIC POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS. HOWEVER, AS POINTED OUT ALSO IN REF B THERE ARE NUMBER OF REASONS WHY CONGEN HAS NOT TAKEN ON FUNCTION OF CENSORING, STEERING OR EVEN CLEARING STORIES FILED BY VOA HONG KONG CORRESPONDENT. WE FEEL OUR POSITION IS NOT BASICALLY OUT OF LINE WITH DEPARTMENT'S INTENT EXPRESSED REF A, PARA 4.

2. IT IS OUR UNDERSTANDING THAT VOA CORRESPONDENT HAS RESPONSIBILITY TO FILE NEWS STORIES THAT CONFORM TO TWO MAIN CRITERIA: NEWSWORTHINESS AND ACCURACY. WHILE CONGENOFFS AT REQUEST OF VOA CORRESPONDENT HAVE ANSWERED QUESTIONS OF FACT AND HISTORICAL RECORD RE PRC DEVELOPMENTS, THEY HAVE NOT PROVIDED HIM WITH EITHER THE MOTIFS OF OR THE BASIC MATERIALS FOR HIS STORIES. LIKE OTHER CORRESPONDENTS IN SOTG KONG, VOA CORRESPONDENT DEVELOPS THESE FROM PRC MEDIA AND FROM MULTI-SOURCE

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INTERNATIONAL CHINA-WATCHING COMMUNITY HERE OF WHICH U.S. CONGEN

IS BUT PART. HIS STORIES ON RECENT PRC DEVELOPMENTS HAVE NOT DIFFERED SUBSTANTIALLY FROM THOSE OF SUCH COLLEAGUES AND WRITERS AS BRADSHAW OF WASHINGTON STAR, AIKMAN OF "TIME" AND VOGEL IN BOSTON GLOBE. WE ALSO NOTE THAT IN THE WAKE OF RECENT PARTY CONGRESS AND IN ANTICIPATION OF A NEW NATIONAL PEOPLE'S CONGRESS, JOURNALISTIC INTEREST AND SPECULATION ABOUT PRC AFFAIRS IS LIKELY TO INCREASE RATHER THAN DECREASE.

3. WE BELIEVE CONGEN-VOA WORKING RELATIONSHIP AS JUST DESCRIBED IS ABOUT AS FAR AS WE CAN OR SHOULD GO IN EFFORT TO KEEP VOA CORRESPONDENT FROM FILING REPORTS THAT MIGHT BE TAKEN AMISS IN PEKING. HARD TO SEE HOW WE COULD GO MUCH FURTHER WITHOUT STRAYING INTO CENSORSHIP OR ELSE WRITING HIS MATERIAL FOR HIM, AND FRANKLY WE DO NOT ALWAYS HAVE THE KIND OF GUIDANCE OURSELVES THAT WOULD ENABLE US INFALLIBLY TO AVOID TREADING ON TOES WHILE MAINTAINING CREDIBILITY AND NEWSWORTHINESS OF REQUISITE DEGREE. MOREOVER, IF GUIDANCE WERE CARRIED TO POINT OF CENSORSHIP, VOA WOULD BECOME SEPARATED FROM MAINSTREAM OF NEWS GATHERING COMMUNITY, WITH CONSEQUENT LOSS OF PROFESSIONAL STANDING.

4. AS FINAL POINT, IT SEEMS TO US THAT GENERAL GOOD JUDGMENT OF VOA CORRESPONDENTS, PLUS FACTUAL INPUTS BY CONGEN, PLUS GUIDANCE AND CLEARANCE PROCEDURES ALREADY PROVIDED FOR A WASHINGTON LEVEL BY VOA HAVE ON THE WHOLE SERVED QUITE WELL IN PAST, AND THIS ARGUES STRONGLY FOR LETTING EXISTING MECHANISMS KEEP ON SUPPLYING ESSENTIAL POLICY REVIEW.

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